WILDERNESS CAMPING. BITTER. SWEET.

by

GORDON JESSE WALKER

PROLOGUE

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The pioneers who ventured into the beautiful country of the Rogue River Valley a couple hundred years ago were the lucky ones. They saw, for the first time, the tall and untouched flat lands that blended into low foothills around the entire valley. The rolling countryside gave way to higher ridges and steep, heavily timbered mountain ranges. Eventually they were given names to identify the vast areas such as the Umpqua Divide to the North, Cascade Divide on the east side and the Siskiyou Range across the south end. The Pacific Coast Range fills in the gap between the west ends of the Umpqua and Siskiyous. What a wonderful place to take root and settle down.

Today, the pioneering spirit still lives in the hearts and souls of many a man, woman and child, and they dare to venture up into the tall and uncut regions that still exist today. Such were the dreams of my two adventurous friends, Glenn and his young son, Jess, and myself.

During the stressful winter months is a good time to make plans for the gentler days of spring, summer, and fall. Such was the case with the three of us. We planned a wilderness encampment for Labor Day weekend, 1985, that was still months away. Each time we visited back and forth, we firmed up the details so nothing would go awry. But the best laid plans of mice and men are usually marred by unknowns and unexpected events.

During our campout it rained everyday. I lost my eleven-month-old dog, Spotter, and my horse wouldn't ride in the right stall of my trailer. But, along with other adverse events, we set up a shelter that kept us dry, there was plenty of food and a good hot fire. We had

a lot of fun, although there were a couple times that I wished all my mother's kids were home. But Glenn reminded Jess and I we had to take the bitter with the sweet, and so we did.

There were never any two minutes alike, and the rough and tumble life and the thrills we experienced way out there, meant a lot to us. We got wet, cold, and uncomfortable, and we got warmed up, felt good, happy and carefree, all mixed up together. But like Glenn reminded Jess and I now and then, we had to take the bitter with the sweet.

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Chapter 1 CALL OF THE WILD

The winter of 1984-85 wasn't too tough to live through. I had been retired for almost two years and it seemed kinda good to sit back and watch as the snow flakes glided down from a cloudy sky and piled up in my yard. With a little luck I wouldn't even have to shovel a pathway to my car before it melted down. If it kept snowing at 1300 feet elevation like this, at least there should be a good snow pack in the High Cascades come springtime.

One day in late February I sat in my easy chair, half asleep, because it felt so good to be inside looking out. My telephone, without fail, had a habit of spoiling my pleasant, wandering thoughts with its loud, clanging and relentless ringing. Such was the case one afternoon around four o'clock.

In my haste to reach the phone before it rang three times, my left foot came down on my old tom cat's tail. He emitted a loud squall and woke up my dog, Spotter. I stumbled over him on my way to the real trouble maker. At the fifth ring, and a couple detours later, I picked up the receiver and greeted the caller like nothing unusual had happened.

My friend, Glenn Earnest, was calling me from several miles away, just to see how I was wintering and bring me up to date on current events. Wasn't much happening at my end.

He ask if I would like to go camping with him and his son, Jess. I hesitated somewhat, trying to figure out if he was really serious. After all, camping out in chilly weather like this would be quite a strain on my anatomy. But before I responded, he said, "How about Labor Day weekend?"

Immediately, I pricked up my ears and listened closely as he unfolded a carefully thought-out plan. The first thing he said was that good plans had to be thought out way ahead of time and cause all other activities to revolve around the chosen days for the trip. Meanwhile, he said, the first time I came down his way, stop by and have coffee while we firmed up plans for a real dandy outing. The three of us would venture out into the tall and uncut country in the center of the Cascade mountain range here in Southern Oregon.

The camping venture sounded like a great idea, and I felt honored that Glenn and his son would like for me to come along. Soon the weather settled somewhat and a call was made to announce my visit to Glenn's home.

They live in a quiet country place, a few miles north of Rogue River city, near a place called Wimer. He has his own business of leather craft. Glenn builds riding and pack saddles, and puts together all kinds of related equipment. It's such a pleasure to go there. The serious friendly conversation, the smell of different kinds of leather, and all the new rigging placed around on stands, causes the time to go by unbelievably fast. There are numerous leather tools of all shapes and sizes, and carefully cut leather components laying around in various stages of drying, ready to be carved on. And many other articles hanging on the walls that has all the appearance of being a very busy shop.

When Glenn talked, I listened as I wandered around the room,

looking over his latest creations, and trying to memorize the shape and size of some of the leather tools I didn't have. I do all this with both hands behind my back, because I never pick up or touch another man's equipment or partly finished work.

Many times the best laid plans of mice and man have a way of going awry. But by setting the stage early, the three of us should have all the bugs ironed out and put together, even adding air to my horse trailer tires.

We planned to leave our homes about midday on August 31st, and would spend the night at the Dry Creek trail head, and get an early start the next day. By looking at a forest map, our destination was maybe a two hour ride. We would build camp toward the center of Long Lake, a place I had never seen. In years past I had ridden within five miles of the beautiful place and didn't know it was there.

Our plans were to take riding mules and one horse. Our pack stock was one mule and a Mammoth Jack (donkey). Each pack animal was capable of packing one hundred and eighty pounds of supplies. We would be able to cargo everything in to our camp on the first trip, except three bales of hay. Glenn would return and haul it in later.

Chapter 2 WILDERNESS ENCAMPMENT

The summer months had been hot and dry. There were a few lightning storms that touched off some forest fires that caused much unrest in the surrounding country side. I suppose a lot of folks were praying for a week long rain storm to settle the dust and clear the air. But at any rate, a Cascade Mountain venture was foremost in the minds of three cautious people, and we did our best to short out anything that might foul up our plans. We were well-prepared for most anything when the day finally rolled around.

About mid-morning, Glenn called to let me know that He and Jess were headed my way and should arrive around 1 p.m. I would have everything loaded except Streaker and my saddle horse. It would take only a moment to jump them on my two horse pull trailer and be on our way.

Sure enough, right on time Glenn and Jess drove up, all smiles and bushy tailed, ready to line out. I bid my wife farewell and not to worry. We would all come back in one piece. Glenn and Jess took the lead and my dog, Spotter, and I followed about a quarter of a mile behind. This would be another adventure for my dog. He was only eleven months old, but this was his third back country trip he would make with me.

Spotter is a strange combination of dogs. His pedigree is half Whippet and half Beagle. He is shaped a lot like the Whippet Hound, and can run like the wind. He has the nose of a Beagle, and is an excellent tracker. The large, light brown spots with a white background makes him show up good as he races along. I called him Spotter because of his sensitive nose.

He wears a light blue collar with his rabies and license tags attached. Also, we added a small chrome tag that has his name, our phone number and address, should he ever get lost. A collect call

would bring us to his rescue if someone found him.

We left Central Point and drove to Highway 62. In a few miles just south of White City, we headed east on Highway 140. It would be maybe a two hour drive before the sign at the trail head came into view. Spotter watched out his side window as we rode along.

Soon we drove past Fish Lake and beyond Lake of the Woods Junction. There is a long stretch of downhill going just shy of Dry Creek road junction where we would turn and head north and travel another twelve miles. The road was crooked and rough, full of potholes.

My saddle horse didn't ride too good on his side of the trailer, especially when we went around curves. When I turned from Highway 140 and entered the dirt road, he almost went down. Glenn and Jess were waiting when I got there. Something had to be done. Maybe he would ride better on the other side. I took only a moment to switch over, much to Streaker's disgust. But that was the answer. The big, wall-eyed Appaloosa rode like an old veteran, around curves and all after that.

It sprinkled rain as we drove along, just enough to force the use of windshield wipers. Soon we covered the distance over the chuck-hole filled road and parked in a wide turnout nearby. Our plans were to spend the night and head on in the next day. Our fun time was starting to materialize.

We unloaded the horses and mules. They were tied up aways apart so strangers wouldn't get to nipping and kicking each other in the middle of the night. Our animals had never been together before.

Spotter and Jess were almost inseparable. The dog loves to run and explore around and Jess was the best guide he ever had. Glenn and I got things settled for the night and brought our plans up to date. It just looked like a rain storm might try to dampen our spirits. But as far as the three of us were concerned, it would have to rain awful hard to make us change our minds.

We spent the night in Glenn's camper and listened to the rain on and off until morning. About all it did was cause me to sleep a little better. But come daylight, there was no choice but to roll out and get ready to head toward the unknown. And in short order the three of us were going in different directions at the same time as Spotter ran around in between.

After a leisure breakfast it didn't take long to saddle up and lash a pack on a big mammoth donkey called Streaker. He was a special animal to have along on our trip because Glenn and his family had raised him from a baby. In fact, Jess and Streaker had spent a lot of time together as the donkey was trained to show. There were a lot of blue ribbons hanging on the wall at their home to prove that he was an outstanding animal.

When we left the trail head traveling in a westerly direction, we went down hill for aways. Then the trail passed through country that was mostly level with very little adverse along the way.

We rode through timbered areas consisting of mostly Lodgepole pine with other species such as Shasta and Mountain Hemlock, fir trees scattered around. There were numerous glades and openings along the way.

The trail dust had been well settled by recent sprinkles. In fact now and then there were a few places that held standing water. We also

noticed man tracks that had gone in ahead of us. Looked like they had a big dog along, judging by the size of his tracks.

The weather wasn't too bad at first. The stock traveled good and we were making good time. Soon we came to a trail junction. One sign pointed toward "Long Lake" and another one said "Island Lake". They are part of the Blue Canyon Complex. Now and then we found evidence of hunter camps along the way, mostly near a stringer meadow where water was available.

Soon we saw the shimmering blue water at the east end of Long Lake. At the same moment a dog started barking from a camp up ahead. Looked like we had caught up with the ones who were making tracks ahead of us.

I got down and caught my dog, Spotter. The other dog might try to eat him up. Sure enough, a man and his young son had come in to enjoy the Labor Day weekend. But it looked like rain more than ever now. We greeted our neighbors and rode on by. Soon our campsite would come into view near the lake, and we would try to get things in order before it cut loose and soaked things up too much.

We chose a spot for our camp where it was just a little high for good drainage. It didn't take long to unpack and get things laid out. It was starting to rain. There was only one sour note so far on our wilderness adventure. Glenn had to ride back to the trail head and bring in a few bales of hay. He chose to make the trip by himself. Jess and I would rig up a shelter and maybe have lunch ready by the time he got back. The rain was coming down harder.

Chapter 3 Cold, Wet and Hungry

I had spent a lot of time in country like this during 16 years of riding across and around on three Great Divides. They are the Umpqua, Cascades and Siskiyou Mountains. My saddle horse carried me many a mile, and I have made camp in various kinds of weather all over the Rogue River National Forest and a few other places.

I've been caught in many a lightning storm and have had to abandon my saddle horse and pack mules a few times, because their sweaty bodies draw lightning. One day I got soaking wet two times and dried out once and a half in a 14 hour ride. Another time I spent eleven hours in the saddle, leading two pack mules, and it rained on me the entire time. I rode up a ridge as a lightning storm was right overhead. There was nothing to do but to keep moving. Torrents of hail showered us with a thirty mile an hour wind fanning it. Two mules followed behind with trail crew supplies.

I could tell stories about dozens of stormy rides I've lived through. I never did ride up into a raging storm unless it meant life or death for someone. But I've ridden through a great deal of sour weather, hours on end.

Glenn, Jess, and I were going to camp out in the kind of country we dearly loved. Even though it looked like it would be a little nasty, weather-wise, we were optimistic about the whole thing and at the moment, we could have cared less about a stormy forecast.

We got things unloaded, unsaddled, and squared away, being careful to cover our food and bed rolls so they would stay reasonably dry.

Spotter was running around and didn't seem to mind the rain too much. Jess would slow down from his busy task and throw a stick for the little, short-haired dog, much to his delight. Jess told me later it would keep him moving around and keep him warmed up.

Glenn was making preparations to head back to the trail head and cargo in a mule load of hay. I just didn't envy him a bit because I knew full well it would be a rough drag even at best. The mule he rode seemed to be a little over anxious and the rainy day didn't help matters a bit. The three of us knew we had to take the bitter with the sweet, but seemed like the sweet part for Glenn was going to be slow showing up.

By now the weather acted like it couldn't make up its mind whether to sprinkle little soaking raindrops, or act like a thunder storm, sending down big ones along with a little sleet. But we hoped it wouldn't shower us with tub-fulls all at once and not let up.

Meanwhile, Jess wasn't still for a minute. Bad weather wasn't going to spoil things for him. As for me, I wished more than ever that all my mother's kids were safe at home. Out here a feller could let himself get quite miserable.

Jess was laying out a plan as to where our shelter should be. We worked together like grown men would, and he was around 10 or 11 years old. He is a good-natured, slim-built boy, and easy to get along with.

I was amazed the way he went about doing the chores at hand. I've seen a lot of experienced men miss things and drag their feet when a camp had to be set up under such adverse conditions, but that certainly didn't apply to Jess. In fact, a couple of times I started to work at something and he would suggest another way to do the job. Quickly, I would run his plan through my mind, and he would be right. For his age, he was unusually alert.

We stretched a rope across between two Mountain Hemlock trees about 6 feet above the ground. The two of us unrolled a large piece of clear plastic, about 4 mill weight, and draped it over the rope. Each side was tied hard and fast to pegs driven in the ground. A pack cover was pulled across the open end, and tied flat. With Jess being such a good sport and the way things were shaping up, I started looking at our situation in just a little different light.

We put our bed rolls inside and mounted a two-burner propane gas stove on a pack box at the open end. We used another pack box as a combination cupboard and table. Spotter was snuggled up on a pack saddle pad, peering out at us from another one Jess had draped over him.

By now I was sort of feeling the pangs of hunger and decided to grope around in my saddle bags and scare up a sandwich and a hot cup of coffee. Things were looking better all the time. I could hear Jess and Spotter puttering around outside, but my back was turned toward them. Suddenly there was a loud crash at the front of the shelter. Danged near choked on a swallow of coffee. I jumped up for a quick look, expecting the worst, but it was Jess dropping a load of firewood. He stood there grinning because he saw a startled look on the face of an old retired mule skinner. He told me to sit tight while he hauled in two more loads of wood. He layed a pack cover over it to help keep it dry.

Another thing we did while setting up our shelter was to rig up something to build our campfire under. An eight foot by ten foot blue

plastic tarp did the trick. With pieces of binding twine and a chunk of hemp rope, a shelter was rigged up, high enough so heat shouldn't melt it too much. The center was held a little higher that the outside edges. About all we needed was water to collect in a pool over our warming fire and have about ten gallons of water come down and douse it out.

Finally Jess and Spotter came inside our overgrown pup tent and rested a moment. Our dog snuggled up on a dry pack saddle pad, shivering from being so wet. I draped a saddle blanket over him so as to hold in his body heat. He caught on fast, soon simmered down and dozed off.

Meanwhile, Jess rustled around and built himself a man-sized sandwich. Between bites he started talking, something he hadn't done too much of. I was amazed about how wilderness-wise this young man was. He told me things I hadn't learned until I was maybe 30 years old. About all I did was listen and heartily agree.

While he munched away he layed out a plan. As soon as he finished his snack he wanted to build a fire. He half told me and halfway ask if he could do the honors. Right then, cold chills run along my spine and it seemed like a smart idea. From then on Jess told me how it should be done.

He would look for an old growth tree that had a lot of small, dead branches. They would most likely be dry because the rain couldn't soak them up. They would be more sheltered. He would break the twigs up and place them next to a chunk of dry wood. The mound of sticks resembled a half wigwam with the small opening in one side to apply a lighted match. He said, "I'll bet I can start a fire using only one match." Well, the way he had it figured, I was glad I didn't call him on that one, because hard telling what I might have lost, maybe even my dog.

I'm mighty glad I didn't call that young man on that bet, because my dog, Spotter, might have acquired a new master. I could see that Jess knew what he was doing. Needless to say, in short order we were enjoying the warmth of a one-match fire. Jess started talking, and what he had to say about wilderness camping amazed me.

Jess went on to tell what anyone should do if they ever got lost out here. Never panic, stay in one place. Someone would come along in a day or two. Never venture away from camp without adequate clothing. Carry some kind of food, a sharp knife, and waterproof matches.

The young man went on and on about the do's and don'ts on living in the mountains and camping like we were. I realized he had listened carefully when he was taught these things, and loved to tell about it. I was glad the two of us were here, with Spotter being our watch dog. As I listened to his words of wisdom unfold, I found out that Jess was a deep thinker for his age. He didn't talk much when there was a lot of action going on, but I feel that he anticipated what might lay ahead and had a plan in his mind to react. (Sort of like when I am riding along down the trail and my horse stumbles. I would react accordingly because I thought about such things when I climbed up in the saddle.)

We sort of spruced things up inside our see-through shelter. The rain was coming down steady now, with very little wind. Mattresses were filled with air to the right pressure, and we rearranged a few pebbles before they were layed in place. Glenn would sleep at the back of our shelter. I would be at the front and Jess would be bedded down

in the center. Spotter would sleep between Jess and I.

While Jess and I busied ourselves setting up camp, Glenn had been preparing a spot to stack hay and rigged up a place to tie the stock. Regardless of the adverse weather, things fell into place amazingly fast.

Chapter 4 Mule Skinner's Determination

One of the greatest pleasures of life, as far as I'm concerned, is to camp out and rough it. I have learned many a trick about being out in the open with a makeshift shelter and a few cooking utensils. A coffee pot, frying pan, and a bucket of some kind to heat water in, and a plate to eat the food from was enough. I've eaten many a meal that was cooked by using heavy tin foil. (Aluminum foil) And a tough old beef steak cooked on a grate over a bed of hot coals can't be matched for taste. A little pounding with a dull hatchet before it is layed in place tenderizes it down to where you can danged near cut it with a fork.

I've been in the saddle as my horse covered hundreds of miles of trails and cross country riding during the last 40 years. Generally there would be from one to five head of long-eared mules in tow. There were times when a lot of hours went by before I could relax and enjoy a good meal. There is no such thing as setting up and sticking to a schedule when you work with pack stock. Yellow jackets, bear or most anything can cause considerable unrest in a string of pack mules (or horses), and your timing is interrupted for maybe two or so hours on one wreck. There are never, ever, any two minutes alike and generally not even remotely similar. It didn't make a bit of difference how gentle your animals are or how many years experience you have lived through, there is always the unknown just up ahead. It causes you to be on the alert and be as ready as you can get, just in case your horse spooks, rears up or stumbles for some reason. But a 26 mile drag without any mishaps nearly always caused me to be grouchy when I got back to home base. Nothing had happened that would be worth telling. A trip so repetitious was a waste of time. No stories to tell at all.

But, even so, when a long, two day drag was at hand, I would pull out from home base hitching rail well-prepared to cope with unexpected events all along the way. From years of experience I quickly learned that good food to prepare, and a warm comfortable bed, were a must. A mule skinner gets up early, and is ready to face another rough and tumble day. A cooked meal and warm dry camp helps to recondition his disposition, ready for another hard ride. With a lot of luck my plans sort of fell into place after a tiring day, a typical meal, well prepared , would stick to my ribs and cause my outlook on life to be much brighter.

During cold weather I would build two fires, one to cook over and the other to stay warm by. An armload of bark from a down log would make a dandy bed of hot coals. I would put a ring of rocks around a fire pit and place a heavy grate, about one inch mesh, across the rocks. A coffee pot placed at one edge, and a bucket of fresh water on the other side. A couple potatoes were rolled up in two separate pieces of foil and placed in the hot coals at the opening where you poked the firewood in. The next step was to lay a beef steak at a good

spot so it wouldn't cook too fast. Meanwhile, I'd slice up a couple tomatoes, and carve up half a small onion, and open a can of fruit of some kind. It's surprising how quick a meal like this can be prepared. Breakfast would generally be bacon and eggs with hot buttered toast and plenty of coffee to rinse it down. My toaster was a green forked stick with a long handle. Really works good.

Glenn, Jess and I had carefully layed out plans for our campout. Comfortable bed rolls and good food were the order of the day. As far as our riding stock and pack animals, we were well fixed. I rode a big horse and led an overgrown donkey called Streaker. He was a big Mammoth Jack, and could carry 180 pounds. Looked like his load didn't amount to much when he out run a nest of yellow jackets. Glenn and Jess had raised the big, easy going animal.

Jess rode a nice-sized gentle mule. He could climb up in the saddle from either side, and no doubt, dismount by crawling out over either end. It was a pleasure watching as the mule ambled along down the trail as Jess banged him in the ribs with his heels to keep him moving.

Glenn rode a big black-colored mule he called Tansey. It had a lot of good sense, but at times he wanted to do things his rider didn't like. The big glossy animal felt at ease, following along behind or somewhere in a pack string. But to actually take the lead and be the first one to make tracks on a wilderness trail was a nerve-wracking ordeal for him. Such was the case when Glenn had to ride back to the trail head and haul in the three bales of hay.

Glenn rested a bit and sipped at a cup of coffee as we layed out immediate plans. While he was gone, Jess and I would do what we could at our sopping wet camp. The rain was persistent, but like I said before, it would take a lot more than being wet to dampen our spirits. Jess was eager to get busy. He was certainly a good sport.

Glenn checked the cinch on Tansey's saddle and looked to make sure the other mule's pack saddle wouldn't slip. He took inventory of articles needed on the hay haul, lash rope, pack cover, etc.

He bid us fair ado, swung up into the saddle and rode away. His mount didn't much like the idea of leaving the other stock, but Glenn reacted to correct anything Tansey didn't agree to as they rode out of sight a couple hundred yards away. The mule was moving his head back and forth watching over his shoulders. His big long ears were pivoting around trying to match up sounds that could be friendly or threatening. Looked like he was weaving back and forth as they meandered along.

Jess looked a little sad, or maybe it was disappointment as he watched his Dad ride away out of sight, but that didn't last long. The young man bounced back quickly. He broke off the end of a dead tree limb and threw it out over Spotter's head. It landed in some tall grass. The dog would be busy for awhile but eventually he would find the sticks and pieces of wood laying around. Spotter wouldn't give up until he found one that had the smell of Jess's hand on it. That is why I called my dog Spotter.

Now it was time to get on with the program. It took some doing for me to keep up. Jess had things pretty well planned, and I sort of staggered around, doing the heavy lifting and reaching up high to tie off a rope or a piece of orange binding twine to anchor something down.

Meanwhile, Glenn and his one mule pack string were rolling right along. A mule or horse that has never been a leader or the first one

up the trail, is sometimes shy and a bit spooky. Suddenly Tansey stopped dead in his tracks, so quick his front feet pushed packed soil ahead of his toes. He squared off, spraddle-legged, long ears trained toward an object beside the trail. Glenn was ready for any such unexpected events and I doubt if he bounced a bit. Tansey had spotted the dark end of a sawed off Lodgepole Pine and knew full well it was going to come alive and smack him right between the eyes. It took a moment to convince the frightened animal it was safe to pass by. A light-colored rounded boulder by the trail didn't help a bit to settle the poor animal's nerves. He circled wide and never took his eyes off it until he was well past.

Little episodes like this kept up all along the way. I'm sure that if a lizard or small animal would have crossed the trail under Tansey's nose he would have danged near tried to climb a tree. (With Glenn sitting in place, hanging on and laughing at Tansey's expense)

After awhile the mule's quick movement and spooky attitude started getting old and a little boring. Glenn wanted to get the hay haul over with so as to settle down and start having fun. Time was wasting.

Riding the trails as a mule skinner, if boredom sets in, it doesn't last too long. Glenn would soon be faced with a new bunch of unknown factors. He was fairly close to the camp where the man and his son were at. The big dog we had seen earlier would no doubt come bounding out to scare off those two monstrous intruders. But Glenn tightened himself to the saddle and took a quick look at the mule in tow. Sure enough, the neighbor's dog started barking. Before his owners could subdue the big yellow creature, here he came down the trail, head on with poor Tansey.

I've often wondered what goes on in a mule's mind. Sometimes they won't lead and will hesitate for every little thing. Some folks call it stubborn. (Actually they aren't. It takes a little longer for them to make up their minds.) But there are other times when a mule will react with lightning speed and the devil himself couldn't catch up. And I've never seen one injure himself in a hasty retreat. Such was the case at hand.

The big yellow dog came bounding up the trail so fast that little chunks of wet dirt was flying through the air behind him. Glenn was tightened down good, waiting for the worst to happen. There wasn't a thing he could do except maybe cross his fingers. Tansey sucked in a deep breath of air like he had jumped into a pool of cold water. From then on for awhile, to have taken a picture of what was about to happen, I'm not sure if there are cameras that can take pictures of such fast action.

That year there had been a gust of wind that whipped across the east end of Long Lake. Numerous Lodgepole Pine were blown over. But the trail crew came through and bucked out an 8 foot path through the debris. And stems were laying criss-cross at both sides of the trail, 4 or 5 deep in places.

Tansey stopped and stood still for a second. Then the mule seemed to have sprouted wings. He left the trail and ran right out over the top of the downed trees. Glenn said he was going so fast for aways he never had time to get scared. But Tansey never stumbled. I guess the dog was quite startled at the unexpected commotion and didn't try to follow. The mule came back to the trail, and with the dog behind him now, he started beating his cleats for safer territory. The man and

his son didn't have time to apologize when Glenn came by, about all they saw, I guess, was a blur, and it disappeared out of sight. But they subdued their dog and tied him back aways from the trail so there wouldn't be a repeat performance on the return trip, because they figured Glenn would be bringing in another mule load of supplies.

Tansey kept on spooking at every little thing that even looked like it might be dangerous to walk by. But after the little episode with the dog, his spooky actions started to get boring and monotonous again. There was maybe about three miles to cover yet.

It was a relief to see the two pickups with a horse trailer hooked to each one. Glenn got down, tied up and rested a moment. That had been a rather tiring five mile ride. And he hoped his return trip wouldn't be quite so nerve wracking. It was still raining.

I kinda have an idea that he climbed up into his camper and scarfed down a bite to eat. It could be a long time back to camp, especially if he had to reload his cargo of hay a couple times.

It didn't take long to put the hay on his gentle pack mule and tie it down. Tansey was standing by the trailer nearby, patiently waiting, and seemed to be a little on the tired side. Glenn tightened the cinch on the saddle, untied Tansey and proceeded to swing aboard. The mule just stood there and waited for him to plunk down into the saddle. With the lead rope in hand it took a little coaxing to get under way. Tansey was a pooped out mule. In fact, it took a little doing to get lined out. But something else was different. They were ambling along at a good rate of speed. Glenn remembered a few things along the trail that spooked the daylights out of Tansey, and just ahead was one of these objects. It was a large jagged rock about 6 feet off the trail. A small two foot Hemlock grew from a crack, and there was some moss down on one side. It should almost spook a gentle, trail-wise horse. Glenn got all set. Tansey sort of glanced at the spook and walked right on past, never even changing his gait. What a contrast! On up the trail they went, at a time-saving pace. The mule never spooked again.

Poor Tansey was worn out and halfway acted like a normal mule should. He couldn't have cared less about any one of those spooky objects. One could have been coming at him at any time and he wouldn't have paid no mind. In fact, although the big yellow dog barked and yapped as they went past our neighbor's camp, Tansey ignored the whole thing and kept on walking. The dog was tied up.

Meanwhile, back at camp, Jess and I really had things in order. Our see-through, overgrown pup tent was going to be a dandy shelter. It was raining a steady downpour, and we were in the dry. Spotter snuggled beneath a pack saddle pad, sound asleep.

More than two hours had passed by since Glenn had departed. I sort of felt uneasy about it, but tried to keep a conversation going so maybe Jess wouldn't fret too much. But I could tell, he was becoming more sober and a little too quiet. I knew he was worried. Finally he said, "Suppose we should walk down the trail and meet him? Maybe something happened."

Well, I couldn't think of any real good reason why we shouldn't, so we dressed for wet going and headed out. Jess started to talk a little more. Now and then I saw a slight smile on his face. Boy, I'll tell you what, it's a tough job for an old, broken down mule skinner like me to keep up with a young boy so full of all that built-in

energy.

The downpour had slacked off a little. We kept trudging along. After awhile we heard a steel mule shoe clank against a rock. We stopped and listened. Sure enough, here came Tansey swinging along the trail with Glenn sitting tall in the saddle. Three bales of hay, covered with a tarp, was riding good. With a short greeting and a moment of exchanging exciting and happy words, we headed for camp. Jess and I had walked about 3/4 of a mile, but to me it seemed more like a mile and a half.

Jess is a work-brittle boy and knew what came next. He led the pack mule to a spot Glenn fixed to stock the hay. By the time he came over to do the lifting, the lash rope had been removed and done up. One bale of hay was put down across two poles to keep it off the wet ground. With the other two on top it was covered to stay dry. Then all the rigging was put inside our shelter with the other two saddles.

Boy, what a day. It had taken over three hours to haul in the hay. Glenn was tired, Jess and I were weary, and we had one pooped out mule. It was time to rest up.

Jess had inflated his Dad's air mattress earlier and unrolled the sleeping bag. He blew air into two mattresses while I used up a lot of energy blowing up just one.

The three of us stretched out for awhile, taking stock as to what we should do next. A meal had to be cooked, and I volunteered to do the job. Jess was just aching to start our campfire, and with his Dad's permission, he did just that.

Glenn was quiet, and although he didn't admit it, I believe he must have dozed off. I leaned up on one elbow and watched as Jess was getting ready to start the fire. Spotter was standing by, keeping a keen eye open in case Jess threw another stick for him to retrieve. After all, there was quite a pile on hand.

Jess had prepared another wigwam-shaped pile of dry twigs and moss. He planned it so he could maybe win that bet. The way he arranged the wood and the starting spot, he wanted to make as a bet that, no matter how bad the weather was, he could get the fire started with one match. I almost did until I sized up how well everything was set up. Glenn knew better than to chance it.

Jess knew just how to get the job done. First he figured which way the wind was coming from and used his body as a shield. As I watched, he painstakingly struck a match by raking it across the edge of the matchbox. It flared up and he carefully inserted the burning stick through a hog-dollar sized hole. The flame took hold. Blue gray smoke started coming from the top and all sides of the wigwam-shaped pile of dry firewood. Then yellow flame took its place and our warming fire was flaring up, and it took just one match. Jess knew what he was doing.

That late afternoon was nice. With a good hot meal under our belts it really felt good to lay back and actually watch the rain come down. Drops of various sizes fell from the dripping tree limbs overhead. They would strike the clear plastic shelter, and it looked as though each one was trying its best to get to us and soak things up. Finally they would give up, run together and roll down to the ground in small rivulets of water.

After we turned in that night, I lay there sort of piecing loose ends together until they matched up. This day had been filled way

above the flood mark, with such a wonderful variety of activities. And it certainly was one I'll remember from now on. Even my little dog, Spotter, seemed to enjoy roughing it. He was only 11 months old. I felt honored to be with Glenn and Jess, out here in the tall and uncut, and roughing it together.

Chapter 5 Damp, Wet, and Sopping Wet

During my day I've seen a few wet Labor Day holidays, so this was no surprise. We knew full well the storm was likely to last awhile once it started. We could have turned around and went back home but that would have been like separating the men from the boys. The three of us were men and were ready for anything, let come what might. After a day and night went by, I began to wonder which way the boys went.

Day number two started out a little better than average, considering the lousy weather pattern. During the night the flood plane raised just a little and soaked up one corner of Glenn's sleeping bag, but he shrugged his shoulders and said it could have been worse.

The three of us rolled out, ready to face the day no matter what. We came here to have fun, and fun it was going to be. Glenn set to and started cooking breakfast. I trudged out toward the lake, carrying a 3 gallon bucket in one hand and a half gallon coffee pot in the other. As hard as it rained during the night, seemed to me there ought to be deep pools of water everywhere. Maybe I could collect something besides lake water. Spotter trotted along at my side wondering if I used good judgment to even leave the shelter.

On my way back from the lake I saw a cloud of smoke rising above the tree tops. It startled me at first, because I wasn't plumb awake. The closer I got to camp it was evident as to what was going on. Jess had started another "one match" fire. When I walked up he was busy rearranging the burning material because our shelter was filled with smoke and disrupted the process of cooking breakfast. Glenn could hardly see the pan to break an egg in. Jess joshed with me some and wanted me to guess how many matches it took to get his fire started. Of course it took only one.

After a hearty breakfast and a lot of good kidding around, the day wore on. If I felt a little down and maybe a trifle sorry for myself, it didn't last long. Because being with two fellows like Glenn and Jess, it would be impossible to feel any way but good.

As I look back now, I was really proud that they asked me to come along on that trip. Glenn was so right when he told Jess and I to look on the bright side because we had to share the bitter with the sweet.

During the day Glenn and Jess decided to try their luck fishing. We packed in a two or three man rubber boat. Now, with just a little luck, we would each enjoy a feast of good high mountain trout, maybe Eastern Brook. But after a couple hours of sour luck, the fish wouldn't bite. It was still drizzling rain. Looked like we would eat beans for supper.

After working our way out of that disappointment, we hustled around and rounded up something to eat. Jess built the fire up and boy did it feel good.

He decided to run around a little with Spotter so the small, short-haired dog could get warmed up. They were gone for awhile, down

by the lake, looking for something to do. Soon here they came, running toward camp. Jess was laughing about something. When he got there he told Glenn and I that a funny thing had happened to Spotter. He slipped and fell into the lake, probably jumping after a frog. Spotter was sopping wet and shivering a little but none too worse for the wear. Jess and my dog sure had a lot of fun together.

About mid-afternoon we were lounging around in our see-through shelter, watching as the rain continued to be quite persistent. It was amusing to see the drops come toward us, only to be stopped by the clear plastic tarp and ripple down the steep sides to the ground. We could have felt cold and miserable right about now, but instead, we were comfortable. Quite a bit of this was new to Jess but never once did I hear him complain or even act like he hated it. In fact, his actions rubbed off on me, and I realized more and more how fortunate I was to be along. Jess was certainly a good sport. For him, fun was easy to find if he looked for it.

Glenn and I were sipping at our cups filled with coffee, and Jess was nibbling on a graham cracker. Spotter was snuggled up under a pack saddle pad and seemed to be asleep. Suddenly he started growling. Must be something prowling around outside and caused the loose pumice soil to vibrate.

The main trail was about a hundred yards from our camp. It ended at Four Mile Lake, about five miles southwest of us. Down around a turn came two wet miserable people, riding a couple of equally wet mules. In tow were two more mules that were maybe a little dryer because of their large packs and a waterproof cover lashed down over the top of each one. Glenn thought he knew who the travelers were and we walked out to greet the poor wet souls, and maybe cheer them up some. The closer we got, two familiar faces took shape, peering from behind waterproof garments that went from their heads down to their boot heels. The hoods of the wearing apparel were equipped with a drawstring at the open front. They were snugged down so their faces were covered from their eyebrows to the top of their chins and in front of their ears, but we recognized the two persistent travelers. It was Ed and Joyce Robinson.

They too had decided to enjoy the Labor Day weekend, rain or shine. Their plans, like ours, were set up several days ahead so there were no last minute slip-ups. They hauled their trusty steeds many miles and made their base camp at Four Mile Lake.

They saw the three of us heading their way and pulled up to chat a moment. Ed and Joyce were smiling as usual, and complaining about the miserable weather never entered their minds. In fact, I heard someone say that at least it beat fighting yellow jackets.

The two rugged mule riders had planned to set up at the same place we were but decided to ride on to base camp instead. They didn't want to take a chance on their mules causing a fuss with our stock. But it didn't take much persuading on Glenn's part for them to build camp nearby and settle down for one last night. We found them a dandy place about a hundred yards from us.

In no time at all the two old timers got things squared away. We never offered to help because us three men would have only got in the way.

Ed and Joyce went about their task like they had done together many times. Each one knew what the other one was going to do. But as

they went about getting things in order, they offered advice back and forth to each other, but paid little attention. And it was surprising how soon I saw the dome of a tent show up between the trees and the smoke from a cooking fire curled up through the raindrops. In an hour or so we dropped by to see how things were and visit for a moment with those two special people.

Jess never ceased to amaze me. He was busy all the time, with Spotter right at his heels. There was always a good supply of wood stacked neatly beneath a pack cover. The fire was kindled just right to keep anyone warm within six or eight feet away.

Glenn was a superb cook. He took his time and never over-cooked or burned a thing. The finished product would put a gourmet cook to shame. And all three of us ate a hot meal at the same time.

A novice camper would consider this the lousiest camp trip a human being could endure, but not me. I was warm and dry, the two fellows waited on me hand and foot, and our animals had plenty to eat and weren't suffering in the least. What more could an old broken down mule skinner like me ask for? But, son-of-a-gun, it was raining like heck outside. Spotter was curled up in a tight ball, his nose was tucked under one hind leg, eyes closed tight, and he was snoring away. My little dog could have cared less.

Our last night was eventless. The wind blew a little, it rained almost continuous, but we slept through it all. Come morning we would break camp in a leisure way and smooth things down to match the way the spot looked before we got there. The only evidence left behind would be some scattered hay that deer and elk would soon clean up.

Boy was that a short night. But it had slacked off raining, just a little drizzle now and then. After breakfast we started rounding up and putting things together. We saw Ed and Joyce stirring around at their camp too. We decided to venture over and see how things were going.

The two people had saddles on their mules and were getting ready to pack up. Ed asked Glenn and I if we would like to have a toddy to maybe help bolster our spirits and warm us up a bit. Jess wasn't hurting any at all, besides, he was too young to imbibe.

Ed set out a couple glasses, opened a pint bottle that contained some clear liquid and sniffed at its contents. He poured some in each glass, about two fingers deep each, and topped that off with some Seven-Up. Man, I could hardly wait. I had needed a shot like this a couple days ago, but didn't take no heed until now. Joyce handed us our drinks and we thanked them kindly.

Without showing too much eagerness I held the glass up toward the two gracious people and nodded my head. With that I put it to my mouth and pulled the contents down about three inches. That didn't seem to do too much good so I hit it again. In a couple minutes my glass was empty. I let on like I hurried up so as not to interrupt their schedule too much. But there was something different about the drink Ed had so meticulously prepared for Glenn and I.

Glenn was consuming his picker-upper drink a little slower than I did. He seemed to be tasting it like he was trying to sort out the ingredients of the mixture. Finally he held the glass up so as to see through it and said, "Ed, are you sure you put anything in this drink? It tastes like it's full of rain water."

Ed stammered a little and retraced his steps. After sniffing the

open tops of a couple bottles he found the problem. While Ed and Joyce were breaking camp they had poured the remaining contents into two separate bottles. Somehow the leftover Seven-Up was put in an empty Wodka bottle. Ed had mixed our drinks rather hurriedly because of the sour weather, raining pitchforks. I saw him read the bottle labels as he measured the ingredients. It turned out to be two glasses filled with Seven-Up. What a disappointment. But it did supply Glenn with plenty of ammunition to give Ed a good ribbing. He told him the drinks were set up like that so Ed could save his booze and we wouldn't know the difference because it was so miserable, etc. We all had a good laugh while Ed apologized repeatedly. But Glenn was like a hound dog hanging on to a gunny sack. He wouldn't turn loose. Ed got a big kick about what he had done, and was laughing at his own expense. I'm sure there will come a time when the shoe will be on the other foot, and Ed, in a good-natured way, will lay it back on Glenn.

Glenn and Ed changed the subject and were talking serious business about our departure from camp that day. I walked over toward Joyce. Her riding mule was a dandy. I admired the lady so much, sitting up there so straight and self-confident. She never quit smiling. Ed and his wife were a perfect team. I noticed he sat up there on his big mule, talking, laughing, and could have cared less about the weather. This couple were always the same, come rain or shine, wherever you saw them.

Just before Ed touched his mule with his spurs, I told Joyce how much I enjoyed being here, but there was a time or two that I had wished all my Mother's kids were home. She had a good laugh about that. Said she would have to remember what I said. They bid us farewell and rode off through the storm.

The three of us and Spotter stood and watched as the two jolly people maneuvered out through the timber to the trail. They had a couple hours ride ahead of them before they reached Four Mile Lake. The rain had let up some but was hardly noticeable.

Chapter 6 Dog Gone

Somehow, it seemed kind of lonesome after our neighbors moved out. We decided to start rounding things up and prepare to break camp ourselves. Seems like that chore always takes twice as long as it does to set things up.

Jess and Spotter were running around having fun spooking squirrels once more and sneaking up on frogs down by the lake. I figured it would take at least a week before certain species of wildlife quit looking over their shoulders and went back to normal living after we pulled out.

Glenn and I started packing up. We should have everything squared away before noon. Our last efforts would be spent slicking things up so our campsite would look almost like it did before we arrived three days ago. The rain had slacked off and there was only a drizzle once in awhile. But large drops of water fell from the dripping tree boughs and slowed our progress a little.

Right after breakfast we had prepared lunches for ourselves and Spotter. Because anyone who works with horses and mules can never plan on sticking to a schedule. It might be dark before our pickups and horse trailers came into view.

Shortly before eleven o'clock we climbed up into our saddles and took one last look at our campsite to make sure it would pass the critical eye of a Forest Service back-country guard. Satisfied, Glenn wheeled his saddle mule around and headed through the timber toward the trail. Jess followed at a safe distance and I rode along, bringing up the rear. Streaker, the big overgrown donkey, walked along behind me without being led. He was careful about not losing sight of us. In fact, I don't believe we could lose him if we tried. He would track us down like a hound dog.

Spotter had eaten breakfast along with us that morning and was really living it up scouting new territory. But he couldn't quite figure out why Jess wouldn't climb down and join in on the fun. My little dog was full of life and always rearing to go.

The man and his young son who owned the big spooky dog had pulled out the day before. The weather was too bad for them to have fun. But, nevertheless, Tansey, Glenn's saddle mule, approached the campsite with caution. That big yellow critter might appear at any moment. The mule settled down to a normal pace a few yards on down the trail.

Finally there was something that drew our attention that had been unfamiliar to us for quite awhile. The sun had found a hole in the rain clouds and shined down nice and warm. Felt so good as the heat began to penetrate my damp clothing.

Spotter was racing along giving chase to squirrels and poking his nose into holes they ran into. Jess was riding along watching his actions, and he saw a dark-colored squirrel sitting on a tree limb chattering and carrying on as we rode by. It ran out on the limb aways and jumped. It was a flying squirrel. Its legs were spread way apart. A web expanded from each side, stretched between his front and back legs. It resembled a dark-colored, square frisby with a head and tail as it slowly lost attitude and came close to the ground. My dog saw it gliding along and gave chase.

The little brown and white dog is a strange combination of two different breeds, half Whippet and half Beagle. He is shaped like a Whippet and can run like a race hound. The Beagle shows up in his coloring and his nose. That's why I called him Spotter because he can pick up any scent with his sensitive sniffer.

Spotter saw the squirrel just before it landed on a tree stump. He gave chase and caught it the instant the little animal touched down. Of all the running and scrambling he had done while chasing something, this was the first animal he managed to latch onto.

I was aways behind to be near Streaker as he ambled along carrying all our camp gear, (around 160 pounds worth) and didn't get in on the excitement. The squirrel proved to be quite a handful (mouthful), and did a lot of biting and scratching. It would get away and dash for safety. Spotter would catch up but found it very difficult to cope with such unpredictable movements of the spunky little animal. Jess and Glenn kept moving along. The squirrel was still apparently unhurt and moving out. They finally disappeared out through the timber. When Spotter gave up or caught his prey, he would eventually catch up.

Maybe five minutes went by. Glenn and Jess pulled up to wait for me and told me what happened. We finally decided to keep on going. Surely he would come back to the trail and follow our tracks and find us.

In less than an hour we saw our transportation right where we left

it a few days ago. It didn't take long to unpack, unsaddle, and load up our soggy gear. Spotter was still missing.

Back on the trail there was another camping party who were camped at Island Lake in Blue Canyon. There were four adults and some kids in the group and also three dogs of various sizes. When they walked up they ask if we had a little brown and white dog. He had come back to the trail and was trotting along just ahead of them. Spotter was confused now, and stopped to wait. Soon their dogs saw him and gave chase. Out through the timber they ran. All the hollering and yelling the people did couldn't stop the dog's progress. They disappeared from sight. After awhile three dogs returned, out of breath. Spotter, no doubt, was still going. Poor dog was really mixed up by now.

I didn't pull my saddle off my horse but just loosened the cinch a little. We ate our lunches and waited. Spotter hadn't caught up with us yet.

I told Glenn that he and Jess just as well head for home and I would ride back along the trail and do some looking and calling. Glenn refused to leave until I returned.

One of the other campers told me about where their dogs gave chase. It was midway of a long straightaway about a mile in. The dogs ran to the south of the trail. They apologized about the mishap again and I got on my horse and proceeded on a search and rescue. Little did I know it would last for several days.

I rode along slow and hollered my dog's name. If he was within a half mile or so from the trail I felt that my voice would carry at least that far. I looked for his tracks all along the way. Soon the junction to Blue Canyon showed up. There were no fresh dog tracks going either way. The rain had spoiled most tracks.

Spotter's feet were shaped different than most dogs. He made a track that was narrow at the heel and wide at the front. His toes were long and narrow, and there was a small dent in the dirt where his nails touched. If his toes were any longer they would look like fingers.

My reluctant horse carried me clear back to our campsite. I hollered, looked and waited. Slowly, I hit the trail and headed back. Made me feel a little sick about losing my dog. Suppose those other mutts hurt him or maybe he got his collar hung up on a limb or something. It was difficult to figure out what to do next.

About two hours later I rode up to where Glenn and Jess were waiting. They too were sad that our dog was gone. I had ridden out through the timber and over small hills looking, but produced nothing. The three of us pondered the situation awhile. There was no use for Glenn and Jess to wait any longer. Besides, Glenn had to work the next day, and Jess had some more book learning laid out for him. I was a retired Forest Service man and knew how to work alone back there in the tall and uncut. I would hang around awhile and let my horse rest some. Then I would hit the trail again and do some more looking. Glenn offered to call my home and let my wife know what was happening.

There was kind of an empty feeling struck me as I watched Glenn and Jess depart. Without my little dog around, it caused that sick-like feeling to set in again. I planned to ride back one more time and do some more looking.

By now, the horse I rode was quite reluctant to retrace his steps. But he managed to get under way when my spurs tickled his ribs a few times.

Again, I rode back to our campsite and aways down the trail toward Blue Canyon. Nothing. My voice was beginning to fail me, caused by hollering my dog's name so many times.

My pickup and trailer looked lonely when I rode up. Streaker cut loose with and unearthly loud Hee-Haw that pretty well broke the monotony for the moment. My horse was relieved when the heavy saddle was pulled from his back and put in the pickup. He was ready to head for home.

I jumped the two steeds on the horse trailer and fastened the tail gate. While I ate a cookie or two and sipped at a cup of coffee, my mind was trying to figure out what to do next.

There was a piece of an old quilt Spotter always slept on when he rode with me in the pickup. I decided to fix it like a bed beneath a tree at the trail sign. I took an out-dated fire prevention poster and wrote a note on the back and tacked it up in plain sight. I told about my lost dog and what the bed was for. Also noted the day and time at the bottom with my name and phone number. With that, I cranked up and headed slowly down the bumpy road toward Highway 140, twelve miles away.

My dog, Spotter, was a smart little guy. At home, every time I picked up my hat he would jump up and was ready to go. He never took his eyes off me until we walked out the door. The big Ford pickup and horse trailer was his, and no one except a horse or my mule were allowed to be near it.

We had a little chicken hen who nested in the trailer manger. When I prepared to make a trip she would have to be removed. The chicken tried every trick she knew to get back on her nest. But Spotter never let her out of his sight. It was quite nerve-wracking when she flew up on top of the trailer and defied anyone to remove her. At home Spotter's bed was an old mackinaw I had worn on many a pack trip. Nearby were a couple chunks of new saddle leather he chewed to cut his teeth on. Boy was I feeling low thinking about my best friend. He was out there somewhere, lonesome, scared, hungry, wet and cold. And here I was, leaving him behind. But I had no choice at the moment. There were two tired, hungry animals on my trailer that had to be cared for. Soon I pulled up at the stop sign at Highway 140 and checked things out. If Spotter was with me, he would have watched my every move and followed right at my heels. The horse and Streaker seemed to be riding good. I eased out on the paved highway and headed west, toward home. If Spotter was with me he would be sitting up and watching for deer or anything along the way that moved. When we got back into familiar country he would lay down close to me, curl up in a tight ball, and sleep until we pulled in to the driveway at home. It was going to be tough, breaking the news to my wife and grandkids.

During my life I have lost a few loved ones, mostly because of old age, and have seen a few close friends who died for some reason or cause. It's always a sad, bad thing to face, and sometimes it takes years to readjust. I thought a little about a few of those times, and the loss of my little brown and white dog caused the same dreaded, half sick, helplessness a person might face. As I drove along toward home base with a lump in my throat, I wondered where he was or if he was even still alive. Maybe he took up with someone else at a camp someplace. I would return tomorrow and planned to be at the trail head by daylight. Maybe if I made some tracks he would follow them out. Or

maybe he would be resting beneath the trail sign on the bed I fixed for him. Then I remembered attached to his collar was a small chromeplated identification tag. It had his and my names and a phone number to call. My hopes were bolstered a little.

Routine living has a way of helping a person get over some of the rough spots. I suppose that is the only way anyone could survive, otherwise people would die of heart break when they were suffering the loss of someone near and dear.

The next morning I headed east up Highway 140 in my car. I planned to spend some time out there, looking and calling. There was plenty of food for Spotter and I, and of course, a thermos of hot coffee.

It wasn't quite daylight when my car lights reflected off the trail sign. Spotter's bed was empty and undisturbed. It had quit raining in the high country and had all the earmarks of being quite nice.

Soon the day came to life. Birds were flying about and small squirrels were scampering from one log to another or frantically trying to draw attention from a perch on a tree limb. When I opened the car door, two mule tail doe ran down the trail out of sight.

There were no cars or any horse trailers at the trail head. Seemed like I would have the whole country to myself. I hoped my dog was somewhere out there.

For the next three or four hours I spent time looking and calling. At the place where the other dogs had chased Spotter, I walked due south for half a mile or so. The rain had ruined any tracks that might have been made in the soft dirt in openings. I walked clear into our campsite and meandered along the lake's edge where Jess and Spotter had played together. There were no tracks or anything that might indicate he had been around.

About three o'clock that afternoon I started trudging back to my car. The lump in my throat seemed bigger. It had been many hours since breakfast but I never felt hungry. Maybe my dog would be waiting for me at the end of the trail.

From the trail head to home seemed like such a long distance. Spotter had been gone now for a night and a day. But I planned on making a return trip tomorrow and continue my search. Every time I saw someone along the twelve miles of the dirt road between Highway 140 and the trail head, I stopped and told the people the story. My business card served as a good reference. If they saw my dog they could call me, collect, and let me know.

That evening we never left the house outside hearing distance of the telephone if someone should call. Meanwhile, I contemplated my next move.

Again, I was up and gone by five o'clock. Spotter had been gone for two nights and starting the second day. Seemed like the distance from home to Lost Creek trail head was getting shorter. Maybe it was because I drove a little faster.

The little bed I had prepared for my dog was still undisturbed except for a couple small twigs on it, and at one side it looked like a mouse had borrowed some stuffing to make his bed more comfortable.

Again I walked clear back to our campsite and did a lot of calling, looking and just sitting down waiting. There were only a few animal tracks visible along the way but none shaped like Spotter's long

narrow feet.

I gave up my search around 3 pm. If he hadn't come running to me by now, it didn't seem like it was much use coming back any more. We would just have to play the waiting game and hope someone would see the little dog and give us a call. He had been gone three days and two nights now, and I tried not to think what might have happened to him during that time.

My wife and grandkids were quite upset. But it was one of those things that couldn't be helped. His third night out was coming up. That was a long time for an eleven month old dog to be alone in the wilderness. In my mind I figured coyotes may have done him in by now, or maybe those dogs had hurt him bad enough so he couldn't maneuver. There was a remote possibility his collar got hooked up on a limb. If so, he would die a slow death of thirst and starvation. I kept all these awful thoughts to myself but I had seen things like that happen.

Meanwhile, it had rained off and on rather constant in the high country. Spotter had been out there alone for four nights and started into the fourth day. My last trip up Highway 140 I had stopped at the old Ranger Station between Four Mile and Fish Lakes. I knew a couple men who were part of a fire crew. They lived there all summer. I told them about Spotter and described his shape and color, also mentioned about the name tag on his collar. They wrote down my phone number.

Things were quiet around the station that weekend. Some of the crew were taking advantage of the wet weather and getting some much needed rest. A couple men were the nervous type and were puttering around, mostly to break the monotony.

My wife and I were sitting around home trying not to think about our pet. The telephone rang. It was Jess, asking about Spotter. He &elt bad when I told him the story, but I promised to let him know if we got any word.

About 2 pm, the phone started clanging away and disturbed my thoughts. I was writing a story. The voice at the other end of the line sounded rather excited, but seemed to measure his words. He asked who I was to make sure he had called the right number, then told me he had some good news. Spotter had showed up at the Ranger Station. Said he was cold, wet, and skinny, but seemed to be in good shape otherwise. I told him we would come right up, and I thanked him much.

While I checked the oil in the car motor, my wife grabbed up a couple big bath towels. We knew Spotter would be hungry so she opened up a can of Spam and whacked it into bite sized chunks. He would be fed with a spoon. Looked like the little dog was going to get some first class treatment.

We made good time as we rolled along Highway 140 toward Four Mile Lake, although it seemed like it was such a long trip. But a big sign in the shoulder of the road indicated we were near our destination.

We drove into the yard and a big man came to the door, waved a howdy, and motioned us to come on in. It was drizzling rain again. Spotter was surely the guest of honor. He was laying curled up in an easy chair that had been moved close to the heating stove. The men had given him water and rounded up some rib-sticking food that he consumed quickly. He was sound asleep.

The man told us what had taken place about two hours ago. He had been working around the yard and decided to go in and get himself a cup of coffee. Said he was thinking about my dog as he stood near the

kitchen window and groped around in his shirt pocket for one of my business cards. I had written my dog's name on the back and he couldn't remember what it was. Just as he read the name, "Spotter", he saw something move from behind a bush. The little brown and white dog trotted across the yard. The man dashed toward the door, opened it wide and called the dog by name. He came running in. They examined the tags on the dog's collar and, sure enough, there was the information that explained who they could contact. Hence the phone call from Four Mile Ranger Station.

Spotter was glad to see us, but was reluctant to move from his warm bed. I felt his body. His backbone was quite prominent and his ribs reminded me of two miniature fire ladders. He hadn't eaten since we left camp four nights and well into the fourth day ago. I have often wondered if he was on the move all that time.

My wife held a towel across her arms, I picked my little dog up and layed the preheated, heavy cloth in place. She folded it around him so only his head was poking out one end. He was shivering. I hoped the dog wouldn't develop pneumonia.

I went out to the car and cranked up the motor and adjusted the heater switch to high. By the time we were ready to take our pet home, the car would be plenty warm. I thanked the men again for rescuing my dog while my wife and Spotter went out to the car. Spotter was happy to be with us.

I drove kinda slow as we headed west. There was hardly any traffic. I watched as my wife took a teaspoon and fed Spotter a small bite of food at a time. She had rubbed him down good so as to speed up the circulation, and he quit shivering. Soon, he fell into a deep restful sleep.

The first thing I did when we arrived home was to call Jess. He was delighted. I heard him tell his folks in a loud excited tone of voice, "Spotter came home!"

The tired, starved little dog lay by the heating stove for about two days and nights. He got up and around long enough to eat some food and get a drink of water. He was housebroken and wanted to go outside two or three times a day. Finally, after a week or so, he was back to normal and hadn't suffered any serious effects of his terrible ordeal.

The plucky little dog had survived four wet, cold nights, and it was mid-afternoon of the fourth day when he showed up on Highway 140, at the Ranger Station. No doubt there had been some snowfall at that elevation. He is a naturally cold-blooded dog, and it was a wonder he didn't freeze to death or die of exposure.

It has been almost five years since the wilderness campout, and Spotter has lived a healthy life ever since. I've always figured he was A special dog or else the little guy would never have survived. Family and friends have always treated Spotter first rate.

We taught him how to lay down, sit up, and walk around on his hind legs. He has been in several parades, either riding on a loaded pack mule or pulling a two-wheeled cart for the pooper scoopers. Elderly people at numerous nursing homes and the Rogue Valley Manor think he is a super special dog. He dearly loves people.

My grandkids and I talk about our dog a lot and how he made it through those horrible days and nights out there in the wilderness alone. I told them that the only reason he made it is because he is actually an alien. We really didn't need to worry so much. He

probably slept on a flying saucer every night. The response to that statement was quite negative.

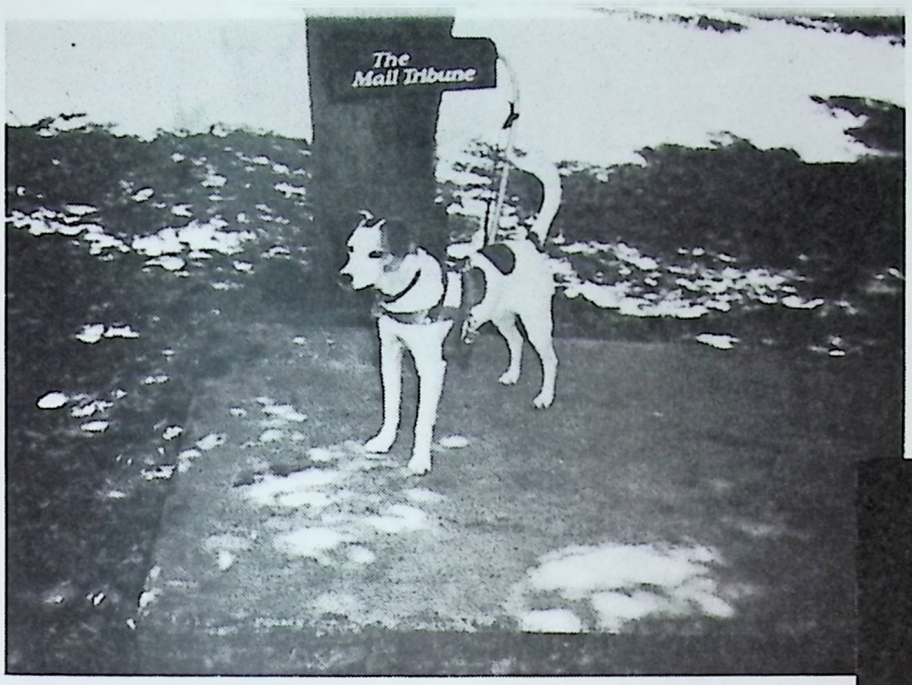
The pack trip I made with Glenn and Jess was one I'll always remember. During those few days I never heard a discouraging word from either one, although there was a time or two that Glenn detected a bit of unrest because it rained so much. I suppose it showed up in my reactions most. But I remember him saying, "Well fellers, right now things appear to be sort of rough, but we have to learn to 'take the bitter with the sweet'", and that was exactly what we did.

GORDON JESSE WALKER

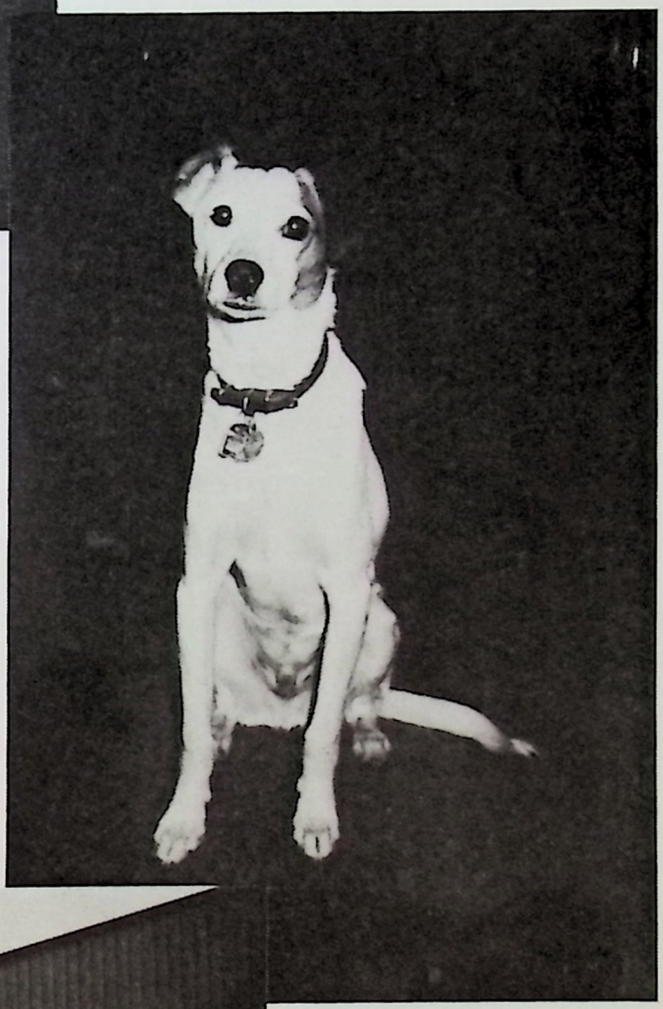
Gordon Jesse Walker

Spotter as a pup...

Playing with his master's shoe.



Spotter looks good and healthy.



"Sit up, Boy!"

Along for the ride.